

## IV. ACHIEVING THE VISION

### OPEN SPACE

#### A. INTRODUCTION

The views of open land and forested landscapes within Newtown lead to a public perception that large areas of the Town are “open space,” without distinction as to the ownership characteristics of the viewed landscape. During the past twenty years, 13,000 acres of open land (33% of Newtown’s total land area) were developed for residential subdivisions. Newtown is one of the faster growing towns in Connecticut. The residential land development pressures which consumed 1/3 of the Town’s landscape during the past twenty years show no signs of abatement. As a consequence, future development will continue to consume open land, affecting the Town’s visual character.



Orchard Hill Nature Center



State Protected Agricultural Land- Fairfield Hills

The concept of open space preservation has broad based community support in Newtown, as evidenced by the results of the POCD Community Planning Survey and the comments of residents at the POCD planning workshop. The financial resources available to the Town to preserve open space are limited and it is therefore important to develop an element of the POCD that describes current open space conditions, defines policies related to the preservation, use and maintenance of open space and proposes implementation actions to achieve policy recommendations. It is not the intent of this document to recommend specific parcels for open space protection. Plan Memorandum #6, Open Space, provides a full examination of this subject.

#### B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The open space planning process began with an investigation of Newtown’s current open space inventory. The inventory process was initiated with a broad definition of open space, to include: State parks, forests and agricultural lands; town parks; town open space; Newtown Forest Association lands; land trust properties; major utility land holdings; and privately owned open space lands, including Newtown’s two golf courses and fish and game conservation organizations. While the latter categories are not open to the public and are not “protected” open space, their presence affects the visual open space appearance of the community and their loss would represent an erosion of Newtown’s community character. Figure 5 Parks and Open Space Resources provides a visual description of the location of open space lands within the Newtown and Table 3, Inventory of Protected Open Space, summarizes protected open space lands within Newtown, by ownership category. Newtown’s current inventory of protected open space is estimated at 5,788 acres, which represents approximately 14.8% of Newtown’s land area.

**Figure 5 – Parks and Open Space Resources**

### C. OPEN SPACE INITIATIVES

The Town of Newtown has approximately 1,100 acres of open space lands and 177 acres of parkland. Most Town owned open space was obtained as a result of lands donated to the Town through the subdivision of residential land. The Town has also successfully pursued the protection of open space by working with non-profit organizations and the State of Connecticut. The Town is not alone in its quest to preserve open space for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations of Newtown residents. The Newtown Forest Association (NFA), the oldest land trust organization in Connecticut, has developed a very



Old Purdy Road Trail



successful program to preserve open space. The NFA is an all volunteer organization with protected open space holdings in Newtown totaling 1,000 acres. Several other land trust organizations also preserve lesser amounts of open space. The State of Connecticut is Newtown's largest benefactor in preserving open space, with State owned forest, park and agricultural land holdings totaling nearly 2,800 acres.

In 1999, the First Selectman created the Ad Hoc Open Space Task Force to make recommendations regarding the

acquisition or preservation of open space. Since that time this volunteer organization has spent many hours identifying existing open space resources and prepared a report titled Open Space in Newtown 2002. This report identified strategies for the preservation of open space and the linking of open space resources by a town-wide system of trails. The Board of Selectmen, Legislative Council and Open Space Task Force have held discussions on the future funding of open space acquisitions, including the concept for the development of a capital fund to support future open space acquisitions.



State Open Space – Kazan Property

**TABLE 3**  
**TOWN OF NEWTOWN**  
**Open Space Inventory**

<u><b>Open Space Category</b></u>	<u><b>Assessment Acreage</b></u>
<b>Town Parks</b>	
Dickinson Park	29.91
Lake Lillinonah Park	3.10
Oakview Field	3.60
Orchard Hill Park	24.30
Treadwell Park	60.00
Liberty Field	13.00
Walnut Tree Field	<u>46.76</u>
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>180.67</b>
<b>Town Owned Open Space</b>	<b>1,108.86</b>
<b>Private Organizations</b>	
Newtown Forest Association	1,000.00
Brookfield OS Legacy	3.69
BSA - Cullens Youth Ass.	17.53
Fairfield Fish and Game	301.03
Nature Conservancy	49.44
Pequot Fish and Game	81.08
Pootatuck Club	80.90
Pootatuck Land Company	282.20
Sandy Hook Athletic Club	7.85
Weantinoge Heritage	<u>35.57</u>
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1,859.29</b>
<b>State of Connecticut</b>	
Collis P. Huntington State Park	38.09
Department of Agriculture	341.00
Kazan Property	162.02
Paugussett State Forest North	752.50
Paugussett State Forest South	1,099.88
Rocky Glen Park	44.17
Former Bridgeport Hydraulic Properties	<u>637.55</u>
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>3,075.21</b>
<b>Public Utilities</b>	
Bridgeport Hydraulic	45.50
Northeast Utilities Generation	233.00
Rocky River Realty	55.00
United Water of Connecticut	<u>8.12</u>
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>341.62</b>
<b>Golf Courses</b>	
Newtown Country Club	40.00
Rock Ridge Country Club	<u>60.00</u>
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Open Space Inventory - Totals</b>	<b>6,665.65</b>

Source: Harrall-Michalowski Assoc., with assistance  
provided by the Newtown Ad Hoc Open Space Task  
Force, Newtown Conservation Official and Newtown Tax  
Assessor

**ISSUE #1: PROTECTION OF NEWTOWN'S OPEN SPACE**

1. "The protection of the Town's natural resources is the foundation for preserving the quality and the character of Newtown's future."

**Goals:**

1. Achieve the preservation and protection of Newtown's key natural resource features.
2. Newtown will achieve or exceed the State's goal for 21% open space.

**Strategies:**

Section/ Issue	No.	Strategy	Leader	Required Support	Required Support	Required Support
OPSP1	1.	Develop comprehensive guidelines to identify specific natural resource areas, features, and trails for protection as open space.	OS	CC		
OPSP1	2.	Define areas of Newtown that are important for natural resource protection and passive trails.	OS	CC		
OPSP1	3.	Increase the amount of open space required to be set-aside during the subdivision of residential land from 10% to 15%.	PZC			
OPSP2 1	4.	Require existing and planned trails in planned subdivisions to be included in the open space deeded to the town	PZC	CC		
OPSP1	5.	Emphasize the subdivision set-aside process to further the creation of a town-wide system of interconnected open space, trails and greenways.	OS	CC	PZC	
OPSP1	6.	Create and adopt a Master Plan for Open Space Acquisition and create a Land Trust.	OS	CC	BS	LC
OPSP1	7.	Develop a means for funding major acquisitions of open space.	BS	LC	CC	
OPSP1	8.	Implement the prioritized purchase of open space.	OS	BS	CC	
OPSP1	9.	Transfer the stewardship responsibilities of Town owned protected open space lands from Parks and Recreation to the Land Use Department.	BS	CC	PRC	OS
OPSP1	10.	Clearly define the responsibility for the maintenance and management of open space.	BS	CC	OS	
OPSP1	11.	Encourage State legislation that would increase the funds available for open space acquisition.	BS			
OPSP1	12.	Support a "490" reduced tax assessment program to sustain open space for all unimproved contiguous parcels of land that meet the following criteria:	BS	LC	OS	BF
OPSP1	12a.	The land is zoned Farming or Residential.	BS			
OPSP1	12b.	The land has two (2) times the minimum lot area for the zone in which it is located.	BS			

**Entity Abbreviations** - BB- Borough Burgess; BE- Board of Education; BF – Board of Finance; BFC- Board of Fire Commissioners; BM- Board of Managers (Edmond Town Hall); BS- Board of Selectmen; BZC- Borough Zoning Commission; CC- Conservation Commission; CA- Commission on Aging; EDC- Economic Development Commission; LC- Legislative Council; OS- Open Space Committee; PBSC- Public Buildings and Site Commission; PC- Police Commission; PRC- Parks and Recreation Commission; PZC- Planning and Zoning Commission; TSB- Transportation Strategy Board; WPCA- Water Pollution Control Authority; YSB- Youth Service Board. **Section Abbreviations** - COCH- Community Character; CANR- Conservation and Natural Resources; OPSP- Open Space; TRAN- Transportation; HOUS- Housing; ECDE- Economic Development; COFA- Community Facilities. **Definition of Responsibilities** - Leader: Responsible to lead and coordinate the evaluation and, if justified, implementation of the strategy; Required Support: To accomplish the evaluation and/or implementation, this entity needs to provide support to the Leader.



Section/ Issue	No.	Strategy	Leader	Required Support	Required Support	Required Support
OPSP1	12c.	The land is undeveloped and free from any improvements including, but not limited to, swimming pools, tennis courts, structures, and septic systems.	BS			
OPSP1	12d.	The land has not been legally subdivided into residential lots, and	BS			
OPSP1	12e.	The land is not used for or associated with industrial, business or utility purposes.	BS			
OPSP1	13.	Develop a more formalized working relationship with the Conservation Commission and the Newtown Forest Association to coordinate efforts and maximize available resources toward the goal of protecting open space in a manner that promotes orderly development.	OS			
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## **ISSUE #2: GREENWAYS AND PASSIVE RECREATION**

1. Passive recreation is defined to include walking, running, hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snow shoeing, bird watching, wildlife viewing, fishing and picnicking.
2. The results of the Community Planning Survey conducted for this POCD update indicate that Newtown residents desire future open space acquisitions be utilized for passive recreation.

**Goal:** Enhance opportunities for passive recreation.

### **Strategies:**

Section/ Issue	No.	Strategy	Leader	Required Support	Required Support	Required Support
OPSP2	1.	Create and implement a Master Plan of Linked Greenways, connecting to Newtown's open space resources to enhance the variety of passive recreational opportunities.	OS	CC	PZC	PRC
OPSP2	2.	Continue the use of the subdivision open-space set-aside process to support the Master Plan.	PZC	OS	CC	
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<b>Section/ Issue</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Leader</b>	<b>Required Support</b>	<b>Required Support</b>	<b>Required Support</b>
<b>OPSP2</b>	<b>3.</b>	Pursue the development of a major greenway ("Al's Trail") extending from the upper Paugussett State Forest to Fairfield Hills, as recommended by Newtown's Ad Hoc Open Space Task Force in 2002.	<b>OS</b>	<b>CC</b>	<b>PZC</b>	
<b>OPSP2</b>	<b>4.</b>	Pursue the development of the Pootatuck Greenway, as recommended in Newtown's 1993 Plan of Development as part of a future network of interconnected greenways.	<b>OS</b>	<b>CC</b>	<b>PZC</b>	
<b>OPSP2</b>	<b>5.</b>	Prioritize the network of linked trails, especially to Huntington State Park.	<b>OS</b>	<b>CC</b>	<b>PZC</b>	
<b>OPSP2</b>	<b>6.</b>	Create a railroad bed trail system in Newtown for walking and biking which could also accommodate horseback riding.	<b>OS</b>	<b>CC</b>	<b>PRC</b>	
<b>OPSP2</b>	<b>7.</b>	Evaluate the possibility of extending the Monroe railroad bed trail into Newtown.	<b>OS</b>	<b>CC</b>	<b>PRC</b>	<b>BS</b>
<b>OPSP2</b>	<b>8.</b>	Prohibit the use of motorized trail bikes, all terrain vehicles and snowmobiles on public lands.	<b>CC</b> <b>PZC</b>	<b>BS</b>	<b>LC</b>	
<b>OPSP2</b>	<b>9.</b>	Prohibit hunting on town owned open space property	<b>BS</b>	<b>LC</b>	<b>CC</b>	

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